

Mentoring In The
Sales Force

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CHAPTER 1 - LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of mentoring is not a new one. Its roots go back many years to ancient Greece, when Odysseus left the education of his son, Telemachus, in the hands of a friend called Mentor who became his guide and tutor. *Webster's 1986 Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* defines the word mentor as "teacher, tutor, coach". Today, interest is growing in the area of mentoring, as the many benefits of this relationship are being enumerated, and as companies search for new and different methods for training, socialization and enculturation. Research to date, however, has been limited to several areas, leaving some open to further study. Peer mentoring relationships in the sales force is one of the relatively unexplored areas, and will be the focus of this paper. Peer mentoring in the sales force needs to be explored because of the difference between salespeople and other workers. Salespeople often must be self-starters, and their income almost always depends at least partially on their own productivity. Therefore, the previous research may not always apply to peer mentoring relationships, specifically those in the sales force.

Before delving into that topic, however, an examination of research conducted to date is important. This section will summarize some of the more prevalent topics of research.

These include:

- The phases of the mentoring relationship
- The characteristics of a good mentor and protégé
- The benefits experienced by the mentor, protégé, and organization from the mentoring relationship
- The effectiveness of mentoring in different types of organizations
- Negative effects the mentoring relationship may have on the mentor and protégé

PHASES OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

The mentoring relationship is characterized by four phases: initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition (Kram, 1983). In each phase, the roles of the mentor and protégé change, following a natural succession.

The first phase is termed initiation, which is generally the first six to twelve months of the relationship. The relationship begins to develop in this period and has significant effects on both the mentor and protégé (Kram, 1983). An inexperienced salesperson starting a new career is quite likely to be forming an occupational identity (Levinson et. al., 1978), questioning his or her competence, and focusing on what his or her job tasks involve (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Finding a peer mentor can help with these concerns. One mentor describes:

I make him focus on his work and on his goals. I have taken projects away until he has met these goals. I give him some calmness (male, 31).

In the initiation phase a fantasy emerges regarding the mentor as being a good role model: an admired person, respected for good performance, and one who could guide the new salesperson (Kram, 1983). The senior peer reinforces this fantasy with behaviors that make the protégé feel cared for and respected (Kram, 1983). For the senior peer, the salesperson protégé is a person with potential, an opportunity for the mentor to guide and teach a new hire.

I recognized in him (the protégé) the raw talent, the intelligence, the common sense. took a particular interest in saying, "What does he need?" Well, he needs guidance. He needs to be taught how (male, 40).

The mentor sees the protégé as a person to carry on his or her values, and one who can provide assistance to the mentor (Kram, 1983). Entering the relationship is also an issue of pride for the senior peer. He or she will feel a sense of accomplishment when the well-

coached protégé is recognized for success. Although credit is not always given to the mentor, the internal feelings of pride are often substantial (Kram, 1983).

I prided myself on developing (the protégé), because even though you lose productivity individually, the organization overall benefits, and I benefit (male, 40).

Proof of the mentor's caring and interest in the protégé is usually seen when the protégé is asked some special task of the mentor. The potential of the protégé is seen when he or she asks for special assistance with a client or volunteers for a sales project (Kram, 1983). When these feelings are realized, the relationship can move into the next phase.

The cultivation phase generally lasts for the next two to five years, when the protégé's and mentor's expectations of each other are tested in various situations (Kram, 1983). Kram notes that career functions are the first to emerge when the mentor provides assignments that challenge the protégé, and as the interpersonal bond forms, psychological functions begin to emerge (Kram, 1983). These functions range from modeling to counseling and true friendship. It is during this period that the identity and role ambiguity issues of the protégé are defined. In this period, the protégé is given assignments by the mentor that build confidence and clearly define the protégé's role in the sales organization. One protégé discussed an assignment his mentor gave to him:

These matrix management projects are highly visible. I've just taken over that responsibility. I've just taken over our rep accounts (male, 38).

The young manager or developing salesperson gains technical knowledge and information about the organization, but also realizes how he or she is advancing on the job in that particular company (Kram, 1983).

For the senior manager or experienced salesperson, this stage creates opportunities for empowerment (Kram, 1983). The mentor has a certain degree of control over the future of the protégé. He or she can provide specific opportunities, and nurture and develop the young

salesperson. The mentor has a great deal of influence over the protégé in this stage. The mentor can also see how he or she can influence the organization through the protégé (Kram, 1983). This can be a source of job satisfaction for the mentor.

Following the cultivation phase is the separation phase, where the relationship faces a dramatic change. This is a delicate period of time for both the mentor and protégé, as both can experience feelings of loss and anxiety due to the disruption of the cultivation phase (Kram, 1983). During this time, the protégé has become more familiar with his or her role in the company, and has more self-confidence. Therefore, the inexperienced salesperson begins to seek more independence and autonomy at work. He or she is comfortable enough to venture out on his or her own, and develop further without the support and guidance of the mentor. Separation can either be natural or premature. The effects are usually quite different in each case (Kram, 1983).

A natural separation is a timely one when both the mentor and protégé are ready to move on. The more experienced salesperson realizes that the protégé is ready to do so. The mentor generally feels a sense of pride when he or she sees that his or her guidance and support prepared the protégé for this move.

However, a forced separation can have negative effects for both the protégé and the mentor. If the protégé has not gained the self-confidence and/or technical ability to move on without the mentor's guidance, the results can be anxiety and poor performance (Kram, 1983). The protégé may be torn between going back to the mentor for help and feeling like he or she must tackle new problems alone.

The mentor who is not ready for the separation may feel negatively about the protégé's new unresponsiveness or the protégé's lack of seeking guidance from the mentor. If the protégé's performance drops because of the premature separation, the mentor may feel angry

or defensive because the protégé's poor performance is reflected on the mentor and his or her abilities.

Also, when a mentor anticipates this loss, he or she might resist the separation by hindering the protégé (Kram, 1983). The mentor might block opportunities for the protégé in order to keep him or her in a position of needing support from the mentor. As Kram suggests, this is often a function of the mentor's comfort with his or her own occupational position. If the senior peer is not comfortable with his or her own job position, he or she will be more likely to block opportunities for the protégé (Kram, 1983). However, these negative effects may be reduced over time.

Finally, the mentor and protégé move into the redefinition stage, which is an indefinite period of time following the separation phase (Kram, 1983). Usually, this period results in a friendship for both parties, often achieving peer status with one another (although this is not always the case, especially if the relationship was ended prematurely). Contact is now informal and sporadic.

I no longer need to spend much time with my mentor, but I can still go to him and just talk. I'll run into him in the hallway once in awhile and we'll talk briefly (male, 34).

Changes have occurred in both individuals. The protégé can now relate to the mentor as a peer, which suggests a great amount of personal growth, competence, self-confidence and independence (Kram, 1983). Relating as peers also suggests that the mentor is ready to redirect energy to new things, possibly to developing new, inexperienced salespeople.

The positive outcome of this phase is peer status. Both the less experienced salesperson and more experienced salesperson can relate to each other on a similar level, possibly giving each other advice. However, hostility and resentment can also be present in this phase. The less experienced salesperson may feel that the mentor is no longer interested in his or her

development. Conversely, the mentor may feel hostility if the protégé no longer needs guidance and may even bypass the mentor in terms of job performance.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD MENTOR

An effective mentor must possess certain qualities. Several researchers have examined the question of which characteristics must be present for a useful mentor.

Age is one factor which is often examined. Mentors are generally older than their protégés by approximately eight to fifteen years (Levinson et al., 1978). Levinson suggests that a mentor who is much older, approximately twenty years or more, may take the role of a parent more than the role of a mentor, treating the protégé more like a child than a competent businessperson. Conversely, if the age difference is less than eight years, the relationship is more likely to be one of peers, and mentoring aspects will be minimized. Mentors are generally in a mid-life stage (Kram, 1983). However, in this paper, peer mentoring relationships, specifically in the sales force, are being observed. This age differential may not hold true in this case. Peer mentors are often close in age to their protégés, and in some situations, the mentor may even be younger than the protégé. This aspect will be discussed later in the analysis.

Gender as a mentoring characteristic is a topic which has also been studied. Levinson et al. (1978) suggest that mentors and protégés need to be of the same gender. However, this argument was based on a study of a sample limited to men pursuing careers in male-dominated professions (Hunt and Michael, 1983). Male-mentor, female protégé relationships have unique complexities. Stereotypes can interfere with the effectiveness of the relationship, as well as sexual tensions. It may be difficult for a female protégé to model a male mentor (Kram, 1983). Hunt and Michael (1983) explain that little information is available on female-mentor, male-protégé dyads or female mentor, female protégé dyads,

because of the scarcity of women in higher levels of the organization. However, in the realm of sales peers, this may not be the case. The number of females participating in peer mentoring relationships may be increased.

A mentor must have enough years of experience in a company to have accumulated the technical knowledge as well as knowledge of organizational culture and policy to be an effective mentor. The number of years needed is variable, but must be substantial in order to guide a protégé through the transition into the company and to provide information and opportunity to the protégé for several years (Hunt and Michael, 1983).

A mentor must have the ability and motivation to be an effective mentor. Ability may be characterized by several things. First, the mentor should have the technical knowledge to teach the protégé any job skills he or she may need. Second, the mentor needs to have the ability to provide opportunities for the protégé to be exposed to situations that will help to acclimate the inexperienced salesperson into the company (Hunt and Michael, 1983).

Clearly, a mentor must have good interpersonal skills as well as job skills. Eight out of nine mentors interviewed in this study mentioned interpersonal skills as being necessary for their role. Interpersonal skills are necessary to effectively perform many important mentoring behaviors such as teaching, guiding, advising, and communicating (Henderson, 1985). Job skills are also necessary to provide teaching and guiding for the inexperienced salesperson. Clearly, without the necessary job skills, a mentor would not have the ability to communicate the technical knowledge needed by the protégé.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD PROTÉGÉ

Equally importantly are the characteristics of a good protégé. Even if the mentor candidate possesses all the characteristics of a good mentor, the relationship will most likely not be effective if the protégé candidate does not possess certain qualities.

Hunt and Michael (1983) suggest that need for power is among the top characteristics of a protégé. Young salespeople usually have very little power in a company and often hope to develop more power, equating that with business success. An alliance with a person higher up in the company may be the best source of this power (Kanter, 1977). A mentor in a higher position can often provide high visibility opportunities which may lead to more responsibility and power for the protégé. Hunt and Michael (1983) term this “reflected power” that is transferred to the protégé from the mentor because of the special opportunities the mentor provides.

Noe (1988) hypothesized the effective protégés would more likely have an internal locus of control. People with an internal locus of control believe that job performance and other events are contingent upon their own behavior and are controlled by themselves (Rotter, 1966). Seven out of nine protégés in this study appeared to have an internal locus of control based on their responses to certain questions. Hammer and Vardi (1981) found internals acted on career planning and development to a greater extent than externals, which would make them more open to a mentoring relationship. Noe (1988) hypothesized that internals would therefore spend more time with their mentors and utilize the mentor’s advice and guidance to a greater extent than externals. Noe did find that most of the participants in his study had an internal locus of control, but his hypothesis was not supported possibly because there was a large standard deviation in the responses.

Noe (1988) also studied job involvement as a characteristic of a good protégé. He hypothesized that the higher the protégé’s level of job involvement, the more time he/she would spend with his/her mentor, and the more effectively he or she would utilize the mentor. This was hypothesized because people with high job involvement identify psychologically with work, and work highly affects their self-image (Lodahl and Kejner,

1965). It would seem logical that a person with high job involvement would utilize the opportunities and guidance provided by a mentor. However, although participants reported high levels of job involvement, due to the large standard deviation and variance, it was not possible to correlate this to the characteristics of a good protégé.

BENEFITS OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Research has shown that there are some definite benefits to the mentor, protégé, and the organization from the mentoring relationship. The mentor often feels a great level of personal satisfaction when he or she sees the improved performance and success of his or her protégé (Kram, 1983). Kram also found that many senior peers feel challenged by this role. This may also lead to a degree of career rejuvenation for the senior manager due to the new tasks and responsibilities associated with the guiding and teaching involved in mentoring (Levinson et al., 1978; Hunt and Michael, 1983). Levinson also suggests that mentors feel satisfaction and confirmation as a result of helping the less experienced protégés in their development.

Quite often, the protégé experiences benefits from the mentoring relationship. Cronan-Hillix, Gensheimer, Cronan-Hillix, and Davidson (1986) found that employees who had mentors were promoted to their positions at a younger age, earned a higher income and were more likely to become a mentor to another protégé. The average increase in salary (plus bonuses) for those who had mentors is 29.0% (Roche, 1979).

Roche, (1979) found that there is also a correlation between mentoring and career planning. He found that more managers who had mentors earlier in their careers followed a career plan than those who did not have mentors. He intuitively assessed that mentors were likely to encourage career planning for their protégés, and this, consequently, is another

reason for the higher compensation earned by employees who had mentors. (Executives with planned career steps have been shown to earn more money.)

Clearly, job satisfaction is a positive quality for a salesperson to have. One mentor supports this by saying:

There is lower turnover and increased organizational commitment among satisfied employees (male, 40).

Roche (1979) found that people who had mentors derive greater pleasure from their work experiences than those who did not have a mentor. In addition, people who had mentors tend to have a greater amount of personal satisfaction with their career progress (Roche, 1979).

Executives who had mentors on average are better educated than those who did not (Roche, 1979; Cronan-Hillix et al., 1986). Roche (1979) found that a quarter of executives who were protégés had an MBA whereas only one in five executives who did not have a mentor earned their MBA degree. A higher amount of education may attract the attention of a higher level mentor, thus helping to initiate a possible mentoring relationship. A mentor may encourage further education for the protégé as well.

The job skills learned from the mentor are important benefits to the protégé. Technical knowledge is acquired with the guidance of the mentor. The experienced salesperson helps to teach the lesser experienced salesperson how to deal with clients and how to handle sales situations in general. The protégé is taught the organizational culture and policies existing in the company and learns how to fit into the organization successfully. A sense of competence and effectiveness is also developed during the mentoring relationship (Hunt and Michael, 1983).

Certainly, there are also benefits to the organization from mentoring relationships. Executives who had mentors are less likely to move around and switch jobs frequently (Hunt

and Michael, 1983; Roche 1979). Former protégés are often better at integrating career and family responsibilities than those who did not have a mentor (Kram, 1980; Levinson et al. 1978).

Mentors help to develop inexperienced salespeople resulting in a more talented work team (Hunt and Michael, 1983). Organizations that encourage mentor-protégé relationships often benefit from the 'ripple effect'. People who served as protégés are more likely to become mentors themselves (Roche, 1979). Therefore, talented salespeople mentor new salespeople who will then often become talented executives and mentors themselves. It is an ongoing and beneficial process for the organization.

Hunt and Michael (1983) also suggest that mentoring provides an opportunity for a greater utilization of older talent. Thus, many salespeople who have reached their career plateau, who may be stagnating in their jobs, can rejuvenate themselves with the new responsibility of guiding and teaching a new protégé. As mentioned before, this often leads to a sense of pride and satisfaction, therefore helping the senior salesperson to feel and be more productive. The higher level of productivity is also a benefit to the company.

EFFECTIVENESS OF MENTORING IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS

Although research is somewhat limited in this area, the context in which mentoring is most efficient needs to be mentioned. Kanter (1977) suggests that an organization with enthusiasm for innovation is a good environment for mentoring. Peer mentors in the sales force often report a high level of innovation in their companies. One mentor reported:

We could be considered innovative with respect to our management. In that, we embrace most of the current management thinking. We try to be on the leading edge of that (male, 40).

Kram (1980) identified multiple management levels as a good situation for mentoring. However, as the hierarchy of organizations is becoming flatter, there are simply fewer levels of employees in the sales department. Therefore, internal organizational competition becomes an issue. Hunt and Michael (1983) determined that as this competition increases, more experienced employees may be less willing to mentor and help less experienced employees because they want to improve their own professional standing instead. However, this did not seem to negatively affect peer mentors.

Finally, Hunt and Michael (1983) suggest that special assignments spanning multiple levels of management, job rotation, and affirmative action programs encourage mentoring relationships by increasing the exposure of the newer employees to a variety of more senior employees and help to identify likely potential protégé candidates. For example, at one company under study the mentor was exposed to the protégé while the protégé was working at a lower level in the company. Because of this exposure, the peer mentor was allowed to see this person's talent. The mentor hired him on at a higher level, and has continued to be this person's mentor ever since.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Although the majority of research done on mentoring has revealed positive effects and benefits of mentoring, a few negative aspects have been identified. James Clawson (1985) feels that mentoring is not essential for young managers, though the relevance of these findings for salespeople is unclear. He believes that energy expended on searching for a mentor is essentially wasted; it should be spent on developing job skills by trial and error, and by emulation of supervisors and peers. In a study conducted, Clawson (1985) found that only one of the 214 mentoring relationships studied was highly influential on all fourteen aspects of life that were identified (including physical, emotional, intellectual, professional,

etc.). He suggests then that managers do not see their mentors as a comprehensive role model, but rather a guide for work related issues only.

Kram (1983), as discussed previously, also highlights some of the negative outcomes of the mentoring relationship if the separation phase occurs prematurely. The protégé can feel abandoned and uncared for, which may result in poor performance. This performance is then reflected on the mentor, who can experience feelings of anger and disappointment at his/her protégé's work (Kram, 1983; Hunt and Michael, 1983). One mentor discussed:

There was an incident where the protégé could have handled something better. And I think that reflected back on me too (male, 40).

A mentor may also have hostile feelings during separation if he or she feels that the protégé no longer needs their guidance, or if the protégé passes them in terms of job performance (Kram, 1980). Hunt and Michael (1983) assert that if the relationship is not complimentary or is ended prematurely, the protégé may lose self-esteem and feel betrayed by the mentor.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM LITERATURE REVIEW

Can all of the aspects discussed in the literature be applied to salespeople specifically? Are the phases of the relationship the same? Sales force situations are quite different from a standard business office setting. Often the mentor and protégé are separated by sales regions, or they simply see little of each other because it is necessary to be out in the field selling the company's product or service. Can there still be benefits resulting from mentoring relationships given the nature of the sales industry? There are, perhaps, certain additional characteristics necessary for a good mentor or protégé in the sales force due to the different dimensions of the relationship between the inexperienced salesperson and the more experienced salesperson. This opens up a large area of possible research.

An important trend in companies today is the “flattening” of the management hierarchy. This has two important implications for mentoring. First, with fewer executive or sales division manager positions available, upper level employees may be less inclined to assist younger protégés. They may be more concerned with securing their own positions or trying to reach higher level positions themselves. Also, with this flattening, there are fewer people available to perform training functions. This might make an assigned mentoring relationship program more attractive for a company.

From information obtained through telephone conversations with several salespeople in various industries, it has been observed that company assigned mentoring relationships are very scarce. There are also several possible explanations for this. Although mentoring is not a new concept, it has only elicited a limited amount of research. Who in the company should be responsible for assigning a structured mentoring relationship? The human resources department or direct supervisors are possibilities. This is also an area that warrants further research. Because there are few companies who use assigned mentoring relationships, there are not many opportunities for a company to use another as a model. Perhaps some companies are waiting to see how a mentoring program works in another company before instituting their own program.

However, this is only one possible explanation. Perhaps it is feared that forcing a mentoring relationship would restrict the benefits that come from a natural relationship. This also relates to the phases of the mentoring relationship. For example, would the assigned pair be given time constraints for each phase (i.e. would the separation be forced at a particular time)? How would the time frames be determined? This also creates another possible area of research.

Several observations and conclusions can be drawn out from this brief review of existing literature. First, it was suggested by Hunt and Michael (1983) that there is a scarcity of female mentor, male protégé dyads, but why? There are several possible explanations. Perhaps there is simply a lack of women in higher level sales positions. However, with the increased number of women in the workforce, this becomes a less likely explanation. Another possibility for the lack of female mentor, male protégé dyads may be the different values of males and females. The woman may have more diversified concerns such as balancing work and family whereas the male may be more focused on work functions alone. Another possibility is that stereotypes about female workers might influence the male's desire to have a female mentor. The male may also feel intimidated by a senior level woman. Whatever the reason, this provides an opportunity for further research. This trend may actually be changing as more women are focusing on careers and having families at a later stage in life.

The subject of peer mentoring is the focus of this thesis. The investigation will utilize an in-depth interview methodology, described in the next chapter, to gather information from mentor-protégé pairs working in the sales industry. The focus of this study is on understanding the sales peer mentoring relationship. Is it similar or different to the mentoring relationships identified in past research? Specifically, the interview will examine the nature of the sales job, the evolution of the peer mentoring relationship, the characteristics of the dyad members, and costs and benefits of the relationship.

CHAPTER 2 - THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

To research this area, primary research needs to be conducted, as this specific subject has been studied very little. There are several different methods to obtain primary research, but the most effective means of collecting data in this case is the long interview. In this setting, the researcher can observe the subject's attitudes towards the research topic. This is a primary advantage of the long interview over the questionnaire or survey. In a personal situation, prompts can be given to warrant further conversation and thus yield more complete and in-depth answers. During the course of the long interview, a relationship can develop between the researcher and the subject, and the respondent feels comfortable enough to give in-depth answers to the questions under study. However, to elicit these responses, the interview must be handled in a specific way.

The long interview is a complex subject. There is much more to an effective long interview than simply listening to a respondent. Grant McCracken (1988) in his book The Long Interview, has identified several key issues that apply to the long interview process which will be used to explore peer mentoring in the sales force.

The first of these issues is the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods. McCracken defines the quantitative goal as, “to define categories as precisely as possible before the study is undertaken, then to determine again with great precision, the relationship between them”. On the other hand, McCracken defines the goal of qualitative methods as, “to isolate and define categories during the process of research”. This goal is relevant to the study of peer mentoring because past research on peer mentoring has been quite limited. Discovering categories of information provided by subjects will enable companies to better understand mentoring and facilitate mentoring relationships.

KEY ISSUES IN THE LONG INTERVIEW

There are several implications of this difference, according to McCracken. First, these two differences “represent two very different sets of intellectual habits and frames of mind”. This then leads to McCracken’s second implication: These two methods should never be substitutes for each other. Qualitative results should never be spoken of in quantitative terms.

McCracken’s second key issue is the Investigator as an Instrument. The investigator of qualitative research may have to search for patterns in unorganized data with a “rummaging” process. However, McCracken goes on to say that, “The fundamentals of these methods are straightforward and transmittable”. The ‘whole person’ concept applied to this method suggests that it takes an “artistic soul” to reveal the themes in the research, but McCracken does not fully agree with this. He suggests that qualitative data is not such an abstract concept that only selected people can reveal it. It just takes a certain process, which will be discussed later.

McCracken discusses the way the self-as-instrument process is easiest. When this process is used to find a match between the researcher’s own experiences for ideas and reactions the respondent has discussed, this concept is easily used. But, if there is no match, the researcher must engage in “imaginative reconstruction” in which the interviewer must accept and attempt to create a framework for understanding new ideas.

Next is the key issue of obtrusive/unobtrusive balance. It is of the utmost importance that the qualitative researcher use only unobtrusive prompts and cues. As McCracken discusses, there are crucial moments of the interview where the success of the question lies in drawing out the response the right way. It is important not to guide the respondent’s speech in any way. Therefore, active listening must never be used in the long interview process

(McCracken, 1988). An active listening strategy often biases the response coming from the person being interviewed, and can be completely destructive of good data. This can be combated by using unobtrusive prompts such as raising an eyebrow in response to something the respondent says. This is a cue that more information is desired and a response will likely follow. However, this body language does not direct the respondent's speech in any way, and thus does not bias it. In the peer mentoring interview, this type of cue may be necessary. For example, if the protégé is asked about his or her relationship with a mentor, a cue may be needed to draw out negative aspects since the protégé would be less likely to offer this type of information. An unobtrusive cue such as the raising of an eyebrow may be appropriate in this case to elicit further information.

Next is the Questionnaire. Brenner (1985) says that the demanding nature of the long interview makes a questionnaire quite necessary. McCracken discusses several functions of this instrument. First, it is used to make sure that all the information desired from the respondent is covered. Second, the prompts must be carefully planned and constructed, and the questionnaire helps in the organizational aspect of this. Third, it establishes, "channels for the direction and scope of discourse" (McCracken, 1988). Finally, it allows the interviewer to give all of his or her attention to the respondent's answers. McCracken further emphasizes that using a questionnaire does not restrict the interview, and does not eliminate open-ended questions, which are essential to the long interview.

The final key issue applicable here is the Investigator/Respondent Relationship. McCracken raises several questions relating to this issue. First, "Who does the respondent think the investigator is?" McCracken suggests a balance between formality and informality to allow the respondent to answer this question. Dress, speech and demeanor should be formal, to show that the investigator is a "scientist" and also to help reassure the respondent

that all answers and discussion will remain confidential. However, a certain degree of informality needs to be used so the respondent does not see the investigator as a cold, distant entity, but rather an interested person.

The second question McCracken identifies is, “Who does the investigator think the respondent is?” One answer is to make the respondent a collaborator, But McCracken does not fully agree. Although there is an importance to have a connection, it is possible to take it too far and allow it to complicate the task. The respondent may attempt to only collaborate the investigator’s ideas, not being fully spontaneous and thorough.

THE LONG INTERVIEW METHOD

Having identified several key aspects of the long interview, next is the actual method of the interview discussed in this paper. Again, McCracken has a framework for this, identifying four major steps.

The first step is the “Review of Analytic Categories”. This involves a review of the literature to learn what has been done, and to draw out themes that warrant further research. McCracken discusses that some scientists skip this step before conducting a qualitative interview, arguing that qualitative research is so individual, preceding research is irrelevant.

However, McCracken explains that a literature review is useful for several reasons. It enables the investigator to define the problems associated with the topic. For example, in peer mentoring, one problem is the lack of conclusive research for certain characteristics of the mentor or protégé (i.e. Does a person with an internal locus of control make a better protégé?). A researcher who has read previous literature has a concrete set of expectations which can be challenged in a provocative way. In peer mentoring, these expectations include specific characteristics of the phases of mentoring as well as certain characteristics the peer mentor or protégé may have. For example, from the literature review, it is expected that the

mentor will have more sales experience than the protégé. McCracken also identifies that a literature review is important to aid in the formation of the questionnaire. It helps to design the questions, and helps the interviewer to know what to listen for. It establishes the domain the investigator will explore. For the conducted literature review, certain areas were drawn out and will be investigated in the long interview. Characteristics of the phases of a peer mentoring relationship will be investigated, as well as the characteristics of the mentors and protégés themselves. Job tasks and perceptions will be observed in relation to peer mentoring. Benefits to the mentor, protégé and organization will also be discussed. Any negative aspects of the respondent's mentoring relationships will also be drawn out in the interview.

The second step is the review of cultural categories. McCracken explains that this is where the researcher begins to use the self as the instrument of inquiry. This step gives the investigator a more detailed and systematic appreciation of his or her personal experience with the topic of interest.

There are three purposes to this step. First, is to aid in the designing of the questionnaire. It helps to identify cultural categories not discussed previously in literature. In peer mentoring, these are the flattening of organizations (and the effect on mentoring), how certain job perceptions (i.e. role ambiguity) affect the need or desire for a mentoring relationship. Another domain of peer mentoring in the sales force that has elicited little research is how important it is for the mentor to be motivated to guide and teach his or her protégé. Second, is to help the investigator prepare for the "rummaging" that will occur when analyzing the accumulated data. The interviewer will listen to his or her 'self' to then listen to the respondent. Third, is to help establish a distance between the interviewer and respondent. This will help the investigator to know his or her own expectations, and to know

that they are his or hers, not necessarily the beliefs or experiences of the respondent. This allows the investigator to distinguish the two.

For this paper, this step was completed partially in the literature review. Since the topic was relatively new to the interviewer, the readings established a framework for my own beliefs. After conducting the literature review, I had a specific idea about the characteristics of the phases of the mentoring relationship and also had an idea about the characteristics a mentor and protégé usually have. The literature has also conveyed the types of organizations that are more likely to foster mentoring relationships. Finally, I have an idea about the common benefits the mentor, protégé and organization experience from mentoring relationships. Now that these are identified, I can determine what are my own beliefs, and will be prepared to hear conflicting arguments and experiences. So, the framework is set up for me to know what to listen for, but a distance can still be established between the investigator and respondent.

Step three in McCracken's process is the "Discovery of Cultural Categories". It is broken into two aspects: questionnaire construction, and the interview process.

The first part of the questionnaire should simply assess relevant biographical data. Following this however, are the qualitative questions. McCracken explains that the final questionnaire will consist of biographical data, followed by questions that will consist of "grand-tour" questions that can be facilitated with unobtrusive prompts when necessary, and planned prompts that will more specifically categorize responses and evoke certain incidents or examples. See exhibits 1 and 2 for the questionnaires used in this study.

Finally, the respondents must be chosen. A few rules apply to this selection. For example, the respondents should be strangers to the interviewer and other respondents. (In this investigation, each pair will obviously be familiar with his or her respective mentor or

protégé, but not with the interviewer or with other pairs of respondents). These respondents should not have any special knowledge or ignorance regarding the topic of study (mentoring in the sales force in this investigation).

The respondents in this investigation were chosen in the following manner. The companies at which they work were selected on the basis that each company had a sales force. A diverse range of industries were attempted as well. The respondent was chosen in the company based on who the interviewer was connected with when the sales department was requested, or by who that person referred the interviewer to in that company. See Exhibit 3 for a list of the companies and respondents that were involved in the process. To gain compliance from the mentor and respective protégé, I explained to the salesperson that I was working on my Honors Thesis with the topic “Mentoring in the Sales Force”. I explained that I was currently working on a literature review and designing the interview process (as well as what topics in peer mentoring would be investigated). I told the salesperson that I wanted to conduct interviews with mentors and protégés from various companies in order to collect further information on this topic. It was then determined if the salesperson was interested and if he or she had a mentor or protégé that might be interviewed. Those people were then contacted. If both the mentor and protégé agreed, it was recorded as a dyad to interview. A letter was then sent to those people summarizing the telephone conversation.

The interview procedure itself is the second dimension of step three. The opening remarks made by the interviewer must show the respondent that he or she is an unbiased, accepting person who is prepared to listen to the respondent with interest. These questions should be simple ones that the respondent should be able to answer easily, so he or she does not put up any early defenses. In the peer mentoring interview, my opening remarks

consisted of a brief explanation of why the interview is being conducted. Simple biographical questions were asked first (i.e. age, title). My first question was a simple one such as “Tell me about your job. What are your responsibilities?” Again, an objective question such as this one helps to ease the respondent into the situation.

The investigator must listen for several things. He or she must first listen for the terms the respondent uses, and the interrelationship among them. However, the interviewer must also listen for topic avoidance, misunderstanding, and incomprehension, and then must deal with the problem.

It is also important for the investigator to think about what is ahead and to think about strategies that may get at topics of interest. McCracken suggests that this may be a difficult thing to do, but is very important for fluency in the interview. In the peer mentoring interview, this included looking ahead at upcoming prompts and determining if some of them have been answered in previous responses. Also, the respondent may bring up interesting points that are not part of the questionnaire. By thinking ahead, it would then be possible for the interviewer to determine further prompts that would draw out more information on that area of interest. Finally, if the respondent is defensive or offering short, incomplete answers, it will be necessary to put the respondent at ease again. This might be a subtle reminder that the investigator is unbiased and that all information is confidential. By looking ahead, the interviewer can find an appropriate place to insert these comments.

Throughout the interview, the investigator must allow the respondent to talk freely and openly. The objective is to elicit enough information from the respondent around the key terms (discussed previously) for further analysis.

Finally, the fourth step is the “Discovery of Analytic Categories” or data analysis. This is probably the most demanding of the four steps. McCracken says that the objective of this

step is to determine the relationships, categories, and assumptions that revolve around the respondent's views and the topic in particular.

There are five stages to this process. In this first stage, the investigator judges individual remarks made by the respondent with little concern about the larger significance of the statements made. This is where the investigator must use the self as a reference. This will allow the investigator to hear a stream of associations evoked by the stream of utterances. As the investigator works through this data, a direction will begin to form, but the investigator must beware of premature closure.

Secondly, the investigator must develop the ideas that emerged in the first step. These observations should then be related back to the other observations made. This will give rise to further observations. During this step, refining of themes should begin to take place. According to McCracken, the investigator, "Should be speculating in a better organized, more exacting context." A general outline of the interview should be apparent by this time.

In the fourth stage, judgment will occur. The framework of observations and themes must now be narrowed and further refined to find general themes. Once these themes are identified, their interrelationship must be observed. Some may be eliminated, especially if redundant, and the remaining themes can then be arranged. McCracken then says to observe carefully whether any of them contradict any of the themes that have been identified. Those that are not useful can be discarded.

The fifth and final stage calls for a review of the fourth stage conclusions from all of the interviews conducted. Then the themes from those interviews must be brought out and put together into the thesis. Now the cultural categories that have been revealed in the interview become analytic categories. The information is transferred from personal responses to

general ideas. When this transformation into abstract properties is done, the conclusions are then ready to be written into the formal paper.

This completes the five stages of the analysis, and thus completes McCracken's four step method of inquiry. This process will be used to analyze the interviews conducted in the mentoring in the sales force investigation.

CHAPTER 3 - RESULTS

After carefully following McCracken's long interview procedure with all of the study participants, three general themes emerged from the responses given. The first of these is the benefits of the peer mentoring relationship, which were discussed by all participants in the study. The benefits mentioned were broken down into several different levels, which will be explained thoroughly in the following section. The second major theme was the actual peer mentoring relationship in terms of the parental nature of the relationship, and the selling job itself as a series of relationships (of which mentoring is one). Finally, the question of whether mentors should be formally assigned to a new salesperson or mentoring relationships should naturally develop and evolve will be discussed. The third theme relates to the peer mentoring relationship as it changes over time. The evolution from frequently needed meetings to infrequent contact will be examined, as well as the change from contact regarding task oriented activity to contact between mentor and protégé for social purposes.

BENEFITS

There are many benefits to having and maintaining a mentoring relationship in the sales industry. These benefits are quite different at each level involved. Both the protégé and mentor often experience personal benefits. These relate to personal growth and friendship issues. On the next level, both the protégé and mentor often experience benefits specifically relating to his or her current occupation. These range from assistance with day to day tasks to general knowledge of the industry. Some benefits are received by both members of the dyad exclusively because of the relationship. Additionally, the company or organization often experiences benefits because of the relationship that has developed between the new salesperson and the more experienced one.

On a personal level, many protégés report that their mentors have assisted them with personal growth from a professional standpoint. One protégé remarked:

My mentor has allowed me to grow as a person. He's not a person that is watching what you are doing. He has been very supportive of decisions I have made (male, 38).

Support, both emotionally and professionally are also frequently mentioned benefits for the less experienced sales person. This helps the protégé to gain confidence in him/herself and in the role s/he has in the organization:

He (Mentor) has been very supportive of the decisions I have made. That's always very reassuring to know that somebody is out there supporting the decisions that you make (male, 38).

When asked about the benefits of the relationship he had with the mentor, another protégé remarked:

I would probably not be with this company if it wasn't for (my mentor). She has been very supportive of me... supported me in achieving my goals. I certainly feel much more confident in terms of the profession now (male, 47).

While many mentors provide support from a professional level, others also provide personal, emotional support to their protégés:

I tend to be a very emotional person. He (mentor) helps to calm me down when I get upset. I probably wouldn't be working here any longer if it weren't for him (male, 27).

Mentors felt that they had also experienced positive effects from the relationships they had with their protégés on a personal level. One mentor reported that because of his protégé's accomplishments during the course of their relationship, he was able to feel more secure in his own job:

I don't have to spend a lot of time looking over his shoulder. So, I have a feeling of confidence and it allows me to be more of a manager (male, 47).

Another mentor explained:

(The relationship) reassures me and builds my confidence here at work... it lets you focus on what your job is at hand (male, 31).

The mentor also experiences certain benefits if the protégé performs well during and after the relationship. One senior salesperson remarked about his protégé:

The fact that I had a protégé that took several different promotions, and each time did an excellent job...I just look a lot better in the organization. I'm just securing my job in the company by bringing better people through and making me look good (male, 40).

However, more frequently, mentors simply explain that they feel a sense of pride or reward when their protégés move up in the company and do well in those positions:

I prided myself on developing people (specifically the protégé), because even though you lose productivity individually, overall the organization benefits and overall I benefit (male, age unknown).

Another mentor describes his feelings of reward and pride after seeing his protégé succeed tremendously:

The number one...source of satisfaction in work for me is being able to be part of another employee's growth. It thrills me to help them grow, see them succeed, get promoted, become an officer, and develop their confidence. It's an intangible benefit inside of me (male, 40).

Beyond personal benefits to both the inexperienced and senior salespeople, both protégés and mentors experience benefits specifically related to their jobs and the tasks involved in those jobs.

One protégé, a sales training associate at a pharmaceutical company mentions that he gets feedback from his mentor that he cannot get out in the field. He comments:

I have grown because I have gotten more consistent feedback and more timely feedback than I have ever gotten before. You don't get that from a manager who may come out and work with you once or twice a month, whereas this is a relationship where you see each other every day (male, age unknown).

Protégés often come into the sales force with little experience. They therefore need constructive criticism about their work and their shortcomings. This is an area where mentors can really be of benefit to less experienced salespeople:

You (as a protégé) are given tasks each day and they are being critiqued. You are critiqued either verbally or non-verbally and you respond to that. So, you gain a lot of insight by being around him (the mentor) (male, age unknown).

Another protégé remarked about his mentor:

He has been able to point out my weaknesses and shortcomings, and I think he has done a good job in analyzing and making suggestions without being overly critical. He's made some good suggestions over the years (male, 38).

There are many facets to a sales position which require a salesperson to manage his or her time and focus on the most important tasks. Mentors in the sales force, who are more experienced than their protégés, can often help the lesser experienced salespeople to focus on what needs to be done, and to prioritize tasks:

Just getting started, your main focus is calling on the phone. And you handle so much rejection, you don't want to hear that. If you have a good mentor, that mentor is going to give you tough love. It's like, hey, you better get on the phone and start calling, or you are not going to make it. On the other hand, he's always there for me afterwards too. If I wasn't calling, he was calling on me (male, 38).

Mentors also believe that helping with job focus is an important part of their role as a mentor. One mentor explains:

I make him focus on his work and on his goals. I have taken projects away until he met those goals. As he met the goals. Sort of as rewards, he got those projects back. But the main function was to focus first, to get back on track (male, 31).

When mentors are asked how the relationship has benefited the protégés, their responses were generally specifically related to the protégé's job. Mentors believed that the benefit they provided for the inexperienced salespeople was generally knowledge about the specific business and industry:

I am teaching him (protégé) the way in which you go about bringing a new dealer on board, putting together all of the financial data, and just the paperwork in general to make the process work (male, 43).

Another protégé remarked about the general business knowledge he gained directly from his mentor:

He would do training sessions with me...we would learn about the products, learn how to sell, learn about different marketing ideas and things like that (male, 38).

One protégé was hired into a position and faced with a very negative situation, where a lot of improvements needed to be made. The mentor recognized the raw talent, intelligence, common sense and drive of the protégé, but realized he needed a good deal of teaching and guidance. The mentor was able to provide the needed business knowledge to allow the protégé to turn the situation around.

(The protégé) and I spent a good deal of time talking about how to handle irate customers that were allowed to do things they shouldn't have been doing. We had to fix that and rebuild the positiveness of the office. I believed he (protégé) benefited by having someone with experience...in different situations, and someone that listened (male, 40).

Although it may not seem likely at first thought, protégés do provide work related benefits to their mentors in the sales force. For example, after the mentor has imparted his/her wisdom and experience to the protégé, the protégé can do many tasks without the mentor needing to worry about them being completed accurately. This often helps to free up the senior salesperson's time and allows him/her to complete other things:

It (the relationship) benefited me because it has freed up my time to do less tactical issues and be more of a strategic thinker because now I have somebody that I know is essentially doing what the company wants done; a day to day fire fighter (male, 47).

Although the mentor generally is a more experienced salesperson, the protégé can often give ideas or suggestions to the mentor regarding business issues:

I (the protégé) am a sounding board for him. Because, with the relationship we have he will throw something out... does this sound right, or what do you think of his, or did I handle that well? We all gain from that no matter what the experience we have. He (the mentor) is very good about taking comments/criticisms ... he is always willing to listen (male, 38).

Another protégé comments:

He's intelligent and he gives me insight and ideas. I value his opinion (male, 27).

The act of taking an inexperienced salesperson and developing him/her professionally and emotionally takes a great deal of training. This often involves the teaching of the most basic functions specific to the company. This can also be a benefit to the mentor who has not had to deal with the most basic functions until taking on a protégé:

It keeps me thinking about things I used to take for granted: fundamentals basically. You are telling him (the protégé) you should do this, you should do that, and you kind of remind yourself, "Hey, you should do that too" (male, 46).

On a higher plane, mentors and protégés can benefit as a dyad, synergistically. These benefits that come from the relationship benefit both the mentor and protégé equally, rather than the protégé getting benefit or the mentor getting benefit instead.

On a business level, two peers who formed a mentor and protégé relationship, synergistically developed skills by learning from each other and at the same time by sharing their strengths with each other:

I (protégé) have an extremely large amount of experience in management, he (mentor) had little to no experience in management. When I do things, I'm pretty articulate about my work, he's not. So, he learned how to pick things up off of me, and I learned how to train and sell off of him (male, 38).

In another situation, the protégé contributed a very upbeat personality and positive attitude. This was a great benefit to the mentor because it lead to a very synergistic relationship between the dyad:

It has benefited me because this office is just so family-oriented and he (protégé) fits so much into that mold. I think sometimes you need that positive influence (female, 49).

While the mentor was teaching the protégé basic skills about the industry, the protégé was teaching the mentor how to contribute to the upbeat atmosphere of the organization.

However, the most overwhelmingly mentioned synergistic benefit to the mentor/protégé dyads was that of friendship. This was discussed as an important benefit by both mentors and protégés. This is not usually mentioned in the relationships that are in a very early stage, but these relationships often develop into a friendship:

We talk on the phone about every other day...he is just a good friend.
We have different interests in life, but really, it's just a good
friendship, business wise (male, 38).

Another protégé mentioned:

I feel good when I walk in (the office). I think our friendship has really
grown (female, 49).

Two mentors also see their relationships with their protégés as a friendship, that started with a common interest (in both cases, athletics):

We really get along. We have similar interests. One day we started
talking about sports and it went from there. We talk a lot. We talked
for an hour the other day about religion. I just like him (male, 30).

Another mentor stated:

(My protégé) and I had a very strong interest in that I have a very high
interest in sports and so does he. We also graduated from the same
college and talk about raising kids (male, 40).

His protégé also remarked, "It's certainly a friendship," (male, 34).

On an even larger level, organizations can, and often do benefit when mentoring relationships exist within it. Many protégés and mentors commented on the overall increase in strength of the organization because of the mentoring relationships:

We have both been more productive. The quality of work is up. I
think the amount of work is up. It's got to be a win-win
situation...that's going to effect the bottom line (male, 40).

One mentor commented on company growth:

He (the protégé) is handling the dealer organization. (The result is) changes that are
going to supplement the growth that we are looking for, for the entire organization
(male, 43).

A protégé explains how the strength of the company is affected overall:

You just have a stronger company. If you have a company with every man for himself, you've got a problem. (With mentoring) you're all working toward a common goal. It's a team, even though it's loosely tied (male, age unknown).

One protégé mentioned other benefits corporations experience relating to the employees themselves:

I think corporations benefit. Definitely benefit from decreased turnover, increased productivity, happier people. I think that the corporation ultimately is by far the biggest winner (male, 40).

Sometimes the company can benefit by a better working environment due to the positive effects of the relationship between the mentor and protégé. The organizational culture can be improved by cohesive, positive relationships:

The atmosphere is more comfortable and it makes going to work better. It improves attitudes and leads to more sales (male, 27).

A mentor adds:

That relationship is a feeling. Having that comfortable feeling in an office is what keeps you here...You need that positive influence in the office (female, 49).

There are many benefits that can result from mentoring relationships in sales force situations and these benefits occur at a variety of levels for the participants and the organization. This research shows that clearly the benefits are frequent and real, and that mentoring relationships have a lot to offer for both the mentor and protégé at both personal and professional levels, the mentor and protégé as a pair, and even for the organization as an entity.

There are personal and job related benefits for both the mentor and the protégé (personal growth, constructive criticism, career planning, etc.). There are also benefits experienced equally by both members of the dyad, the principle benefit being friendship. Finally, the

organization overall experiences an improved organizational culture and climate as well as benefits from the synergy created by these relationships.

RELATIONSHIPS

Mentoring is all about a relationship. However, this is obviously too simple a statement. What type of relationship is a mentorship? How does that relationship fit into the selling job? How does the relationship change over time? The answers to these questions are what will allow us to truly understand the nature of the relationship between the mentor and the protégé, not only at a static time, but over the duration of the relationship as well.

What 'type' of relationship is a mentoring relationship in a sales context? What allows one to distinguish the mentor and protégé relationship from any other relationship?

Generally speaking, research has shown that mentors are generally eight to fifteen years older than their protégés (Levinson et al., 1978). However, in the realm of mentoring in the sales force (where peer mentoring is prevalent), this is certainly not always the case. In my research, I found that in six out of my nine dyads, the age differential is seven years or less, and more specifically, three of the pairs were aged within three years of each other. At one company, the mentor was actually three years younger than the protégé. So, age cannot be a determining factor when it comes to peer mentoring relationships in the sales force. So, if the relationship is not necessarily based on age, how can it be distinguished from non-mentoring relationships?

The likely response may be that a mentor fulfills a guidance role in the protégé's career. While the relationship is not purely supervisory, many mentors provide supervision while functioning in their own sales role:

I go to my mentor many times and ask for guidance, both professional and personal (male, age unknown).

Another element of the mentoring relationship is leadership. Protégés often follow their mentors to some extent when learning about their jobs and how to perform well:

He needs to know that if he needs someone to walk in the fire, that I can go in there and take care of it (male, 38).

Later, this same mentor commented:

And then there is probably, to be honest, you know, another hour or two hours where it (my time) is nothing but making sure that he's managing his time properly (male, 38).

However, leadership does not adequately describe the reciprocal nature of the mentoring relationship. While the protégé may follow the mentor at certain times, there is more of a mutual assistance between the two. The protégé learns from the mentor, but the mentor also learns and benefits from the protégé's knowledge:

I (protégé) have a large amount of experience in management. So, he (mentor) learned how to pick things up off me, and I learned how to train and sell off of him (male, 38).

Leader-follower also suggests a protégé having a great amount of respect for the mentor, but not necessarily the other way around. This also does not describe the peer mentoring relationship:

It is a great relationship, a fun relationship. I think we both have respect for one another. We really like each other (male, 27).

So what then, does distinguish a peer mentoring relationship from any other typical working relationship? There are many different facets of this type of relationship, so perhaps the best way to describe it would be similar to a parental relationship. Mutual respect is often found between a parent and child. Additionally, it is true that children do learn from their parents, but parents often learn from their children as well (i.e. a child teaching his/her parents about computers). There is also more than a superior-subordinate

aspect in a parental relationship. One protégé explained how his mentor helped him at work with tough love, which is often a part of a parental relationship:

You're told (the business) is going to be hard. Your main focus is calling on the phone. And you hear so much rejection, you don't want to hear that. If you have a good mentor, that mentor is going to give you tough love. It's like, you better get on the phone or you're not going to make it. On the other hand, he was always there for me afterwards, too (male, 38).

A parent also helps his or her child grow, as a person as well as in the business:

I am still green to a certain degree, but ripening daily. I attribute a lot of that to my mentor (male, 27).

This analogy, of course, does not suggest adolescence on the part of the protégé, or immaturity of any kind, even though the protégé is being compared with a child. The analogy is simply being used because so many parental functions can be paralleled to functions of the mentoring relationships found in the sales force. One protégé explains:

He's (the mentor) one of those guys I can always go to. He'll give you a straight answer. So, the relationship is more like a father/son kind type of relationship. It doesn't matter if you haven't talked to him for three or four months...it would be nice to see him all of the time (male, 34).

Although not every element of the peer mentoring relationship is similar to a parental relationship, the parental relationship is much more all encompassing than a superior-subordinate or leader-follower description, and much more accurately reflects the dimensions of the relationship between the mentor and protégé in the sales setting.

On the surface, a selling job may appear to be very straight forward. The salesperson works for a company and sells that company's product/service to clients in a territory. While that description may be accurate, the selling job itself goes much deeper. Actually, a selling job can be thought of in terms of a series of relationships. For example, one mentor discussed the situation at his company:

It basically boils right back down to working with our dealer organization to grow our business (male, 43).

This is only one of the relationships involved in holding a sales job, but it does help to illustrate that these salespeople do think of their jobs in terms of a series of relationships; relationships between that person and dealers, employees, vendors, clients, co-workers, and superiors, are all possible relationships existing in a selling job.

So, why then, is a mentoring situation integral for the new, lesser-experienced salesperson? Perhaps the best way to learn these selling relationships is through another relationship, like that of a mentor and a protégé. One protégé entered a difficult situation when he took a new job. The relationship he had with his mentor gave him the ability to learn how to handle other types of relationships, a relationship with customers, and with employees:

He (the protégé) needed guidance, he needed to be taught...My protégé and I spent a good deal of time talking about how to handle irate customers, how to handle customers who were allowed to do things they shouldn't have been doing. And how to handle the employees, and rebuild the positive atmosphere of the office. He (protégé) benefited by having someone with experience that had gotten burned and had succeeded, and someone that listened (male ,40).

The mentor who mentioned the importance of the relationship with the dealer organization later mentioned:

I just spent one full day riding with him (protégé) down to a dealer. I think he has had a chance to see how I like these difficult situations in dealing with the dealer organization handled...Then he can assimilate that into his own approach (male, 43).

However, as in other aspects of peer mentoring, there are not only business aspects, but personal aspects as well. Protégés and mentors often reported that their top priority in life is their relationships with their family. Again, peer mentors have been able to share information with their protégés in this arena:

Over the years we'd talk about, you know, her (the protégé) and his wife have three children and I've got one that's older. We've talked about raising kids and all of that kind of stuff over the years. There's been a lot of commonality in our backgrounds (male, 40).

So, again, it can be seen that peer mentoring relationships go even beyond day to day business functions. The mentoring relationship can help the protégé develop positive relationships involving work (with clients, dealers, employee, etc.) and involving personal life (like family).

A final dimension of the peer mentoring relationship in the sales force is the formality versus informality of the relationship. More specifically, should mentoring relationships be assigned or should they evolve naturally? Mentors and protégés suggested that a natural formation is likely to be the most effective manner, and actually, all nine of the dyads developed their relationships naturally. In some situations, the fact that the mentor was the protégé's supervisor may have helped begin the relationship, but the relationships evolved naturally. One mentor discusses:

If you create a (mentoring) policy, you compromise creativity, you compromise corporate evolution. As soon as you get guidelines, you put limitations on how far they can take something. In a sales organization... I think guidelines might be a limitation (male, 40).

In response to the suggestion of assigned mentoring relationships, one protégé mentioned:

You're certainly going to have behavior conflicts and if those exist, you're not going to get any sort of synergistic activity from that (male, age unknown).

Only one mentor did think an assigned relationship would be the most effective way to establish a mentoring relationship:

If you don't, there will be some who help people and others who won't (male, 31).

However, the majority of responses favored a natural development. One protégé summed it up this way:

I was assigned a mentor here, but he and I never talk to each other (male, 27).

This protégé had developed a natural mentoring relationship with another more experienced salesperson in the company, and their relationship reportedly has greatly benefited both the mentor and protégé.

CHANGE

Peer mentoring relationships in the sales force pass through a series of stages; initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition (Kram, 1983), much like any other mentoring relationship. These closely parallel the descriptions of the phases described in Chapter One. However, perhaps more interesting is a description of how these peer mentoring relationships change and evolve over time. Peer mentoring relationships show significant change in two areas. The first is the change from spending time together frequently to spending very little time together, but with an increase in depth or meaning to those few minutes spent together.

Early in the mentoring relationship, it is important for the mentor and protégé to spend time together rather frequently. This is when the inexperienced salesperson really needs the frequent guidance from the more experienced salesperson. One mentor, who had a protégé in the early initiation stage explains:

You have the new agent (the protégé) in their first two years. They're making \$30,000 a year and struggling. They rely their entire survival on me. From everything on how to fill out this or here is the problem, how do I handle it. They probably take up 85% of my time (male, 35).

This type of frequent contact is necessary early in a relationship in order for the protégé to gain knowledge about organization policy and protocol. Another example is the mentor who went with his protégé on a trip to see a dealer so the protégé could learn how to handle

the situation. However, as the relationship grows and evolves over time, peer mentors and protégés spend quite a bit less time together, because it is often not needed:

Actually spending time (together) calling on customers, not very much. He doesn't need any help when it comes to selling products (male, 46).

However, that time spent has a greater amount of depth than the frequent meetings in which policies are taught. This is quality time, not quantity time. That does not necessarily mean that the protégé does not still ask the mentor for business advice, but it also is not necessarily always business advice. If it is advice regarding work, it is not about office policy:

I'll run into (my mentor) once in awhile in the hallway and we'll talk briefly. I probably have a conversation with him regarding business probably once every couple of months for 20 minutes to a half an hour, but he's kind of phased himself out of a lot of (management) responsibilities he used to take care of (male, 34).

The majority of the dyads I spoke with were in later stages and spent relatively little time with each other. However, this is also one way that peer mentoring relationships, specifically in the sales force, differ from mentoring relationship not occurring in the sales context. Due to the nature of selling, the mentor and protégé are not always in physical proximity to each other over time, and therefore, they cannot spend much time together from the beginning:

I had ten different people working for me...covering 13 different states... It's not like we punched the same time clock, so I really didn't spend more time with the individual initially (male, 40).

However, this relationship developed in the same way, with more day to day business knowledge being transferred in the early stages of the relationship, and less as the relationship developed.

I hired him (protégé) to work for me. I tried to mold (him) a little bit and save them a mistake or two that I did...I saw that and it turned out... things just evolved. We have a relationship (now) that we could go out and play golf and not really worry about anything relevant to work (male, 40).

Not only do peer mentoring relationships in the sales force change in terms of frequency and depth. Perhaps even more common is the change in terms of the characteristics of the relationship, more specifically the change from providing information about tasks at work to a social relationship or friendship between the mentor and protégé.

One protégé discussed the early part of his relationship with his mentor:

When just getting started, your main focus is calling on the phone. If I wasn't calling, he was on me. He would do training sessions with me...learning about the products, learning how to sell, learning different marketing techniques and things like that (male, 38).

However, when discussing his relationship with his mentor currently, he responded:

Well, he is just a good friend. We talk on the phone about every other day for 10 to 15 minutes (male, 38).

The mentor who accompanied his protégé on a trip to see a dealer talked about their current relationship:

I know his wife and I have met both of his older children. Unfortunately, we live in different cities...but there are situations that we have been able to get together in a social setting (male, 43).

When asked about the current relationship with her protégé, this senior salesperson explained:

We have a very good relationship. (It's a) friendship. We spend about 15 minutes a day on average (female, 49).

A protégé discussed how his relationship changed with his mentor:

As I've grown, I no longer really needed to spend that much time with (my mentor). But I would say the relationship is as strong as it has ever been. It's like a good friend, you know you maybe haven't seen them for three years, but you can still go to them and talk (male, 34).

His mentor discussed their current relationship:

There's been a lot of commonality in our backgrounds. We've talked about raising kids and all that kind of stuff, even though I tease him (because) I've got a few years on him (male, 40).

These relationships exhibit a radical change during the course of the years spent together.

This phenomena can be illustrated, showing the change that occurs. Some mentors and protégés also mentioned that they play golf together among other social situations.

Clearly, peer mentoring relationships do not remain static over time; they change, specifically, on two different dimensions. One, these relationships change in terms of frequency and depth. In early stages, time spent together is often more frequent. However, even if the sales environment makes this situation difficult or impossible, as the years pass, the depth of the conversation increases as time passes. Also, on another dimension, mentoring relationships in the sales force change from the point of view of the content of time spent together. Early in the relationship, time spent together focuses on job tasks, while during later stages, time spent together is more often social, as friends. Change is an inevitable part of any relationship, but these are the principle modes of change in peer mentoring relationships in the sales force.

CHAPTER 4 - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, peer mentoring relationships in the sales force were observed. It is clear that certain aspects of peer mentoring are similar to traditional mentoring relationships that have that have been researched by others. Peer mentoring relationships go through stages much like those identified by Kram in 1983. However, the changes that occur as peer mentors pass through the stages differ somewhat. Peer mentoring relationships change on two prominent dimensions: task based to social relationships, and the change from the frequency of contact to a more in depth contact.

However, this leads to another way in which peer mentoring in the sales force differs from other mentoring relationships. Due to the nature of selling, the protégé and mentor may not always be able to see each other often. The mentor may be at headquarters and the protégé out in a sales territory, for example. However, even if this was the case, the depth of the content of the contact still increased.

Another difference between peer mentoring relationships and other mentoring relationships and other mentoring relationships is age. Levinson et. al. (1978) suggest that a mentor should be between 8 and 20 years older than the protégé. However, in peer mentoring relationships, this is not always the case. Mentors and protégés are often much closer in age, and the protégé may even be older than his or her mentor. What is more important to this relationship is that the protégé can learn from the mentor, and as this study revealed, the mentor often learns from the protégé.

Benefits are often the result of any mentoring relationship, but in peer mentoring situations these benefits are somewhat different. While benefits to traditional business mentoring relationships usually include the protégé earning a higher wage and higher

education level, the most significant benefits from sales peer mentoring relationships are quite different. Both mentors and protégés experience personal and job related benefits. For example, protégés experience personal growth and emotional support, and mentors benefit from the protégés freeing up their time by completing tasks with little supervision. As a dyad, both peer mentor and protégé benefit from friendship, and the organization benefits from increased productivity and synergy of the organizational culture in the company.

The long interview method was successful in not only acquiring information to collaborate or reject past research, but also allowed a new understanding about the different dimensions of peer mentoring. It allowed for attitudes and spontaneous comments to surface that would have been lost with a survey or questionnaire. The interviewees who were selected represent a wide range of industries and positions in their respective companies. The long interview method was appropriate and effective in this situation.

This is a good beginning to understanding peer mentoring relationships in the sales force, but more research should be done, encompassing a larger sample size, and possibly researching other dimensions.

Several themes that began to emerge in this study could be possible subjects for future studies. It appeared that mentoring relationships were beneficial in all industries involved in the study, but an area of further research might be the level of importance of having a mentor in different industries. For example, from the statements made in the interview at an insurance company, it seems integral for a beginning insurance agent to have a mentor in the industry to help him or her get started, and to help the new agent get through difficult and discouraging times in the beginning. However, in other industries, while mentoring relationships are still beneficial, they may not be as essential as in others.

Another theme that began to emerge was the mutual learning that occurs between peer mentor and protégé. In one dyad, the protégé discussed how his mentor knew little about management and marketing, and he knew little about selling. As their relationship grew, they learned things from each other, rather than the protégé only learning skills from the mentor. It is probable that this mutual learning takes place often in peer mentoring relationships, and should be the subject of further research as well.

The issue of assigned mentoring relationships is another area of further research needed. Does assigning a mentor compromise the natural creativity and evolution of the relationship? Does it place too many limits on the mentor and protégé? However, if mentors are not assigned, will certain people be held back by those who do have a mentor advocating for them? Finally, while most participants in this study preferred informal relationships, how can the organization encourage or control these informal relationships?

More research should also be done on the 'nature' of the peer mentoring relationship. The mentor is not purely a leader or a supervisor in the relationship, but is this because of the nature of the sales situation? Are there functions that the mentor and protégé provide that are unique to peer mentoring in relation to selling? This situation also warrants further research.

Several participants in the study eluded to, or specifically mentioned that they viewed their relationship with their mentor or protégé as a parent/child relationship. By following this model, it seems then that parenting skills learned in the household may be helpful to mentors when dealing with their protégés. Are mentors who have children more effective than those who do not? Or, are the skills needed to effectively deal with a protégé unrelated to actual parenting skills.

Although benefits of the peer mentoring relationship were discussed in depth in this paper, there are still other issues regarding these benefits that need to be researched. Can organizations quantify these benefits, and show how these relationships affect an organization's bottom line? Are there specific sales related benefits from the relationship because selling is so dependent on productivity? Finally, because of the benefits protégés experienced from their peer mentoring relationships, are they more likely to become peer mentors than those who did not have mentors?

A final area of possible future research is the issue of proximity. Are peer mentoring relationships more important to salespeople because they are often located in territories far from other members of the company? Is it necessary for these people to have a specific person who guides them through the beginning steps, teaching them not only policy, but how to handle clients, sales situations etc.? Is it more important for a salesperson to have a peer mentor than another business person because of this situation?

Although a great amount of research still needs to be completed, it has been shown that peer mentoring relationships are often a positive experience for sales people, and should be encouraged for the benefit of the mentor, the protégé, the dyad, and the organization.

Exhibit 1 - Questionnaire For The Mentor

Date:

Place:

Time:

Subject's Name:

Sex:

Age:

Level of Management/Title:

Years of Experience:

- 1) Tell me about your job. What are your tasks and responsibilities?
- 2) What are the specific skills you need for those tasks?
- 3) How is the management hierarchy set up in your organization?
- 4) Describe any internal competition that exists in your company.
- 5) Would you characterize your company as innovative? How so?
- 6) What are the sources that motivate you to do your job?
- 7) How do you feel about your job?

- 8) Tell me about the current relationship you have with your protégé.
- 9) How did the relationship begin?
- 10) How long has this relationship lasted?
- 11) How would you describe your relationship in the past?
- 12) How much time do you spend with your protégé?
- 13) What functions do you provide for your protégé?
- 14) Have you given your protégé any special assignments that have exposed him/her to multiple levels of management?
- 15) How do you think this relationship has benefited your protégé?
- 16) How do you think this relationship has benefited you?
- 17) How has this relationship benefited your company?
- 18) Has anything or anyone in your company hindered your relationship in any way?
- 19) Have you ever had any negative experiences associated with your relationship?

- 20) Do you ever feel role ambiguity or role conflict in your job? From what sources?

Exhibit 2 - Questionnaire For The Protégé

Date:

Place:

Time:

Subject's Name:

Sex:

Age:

Level of Management/Title:

Years of Experience:

- 1) Tell me about your job. What are your tasks and responsibilities?
- 2) What are the skills you need for these tasks?
- 3) How is the management hierarchy set up in your company?
- 4) Describe any internal competition present in your company.
- 5) Would you characterize your company as innovative? How so?
- 6) How many of work do you do each week?
- 7) Do you often take work home?
- 8) How does your job fit into your life priorities?
- 9) How far do you wish to advance in your company?

- 10) Tell me about the current relationship you have with your mentor.
- 11) How did the relationship begin?
- 12) Why did you seek out this relationship?
- 13) How would you describe the relationship in the past?
- 14) How long has this relationship existed?
- 15) How much time do you spend with your mentor?
- 16) How do you think this relationship has benefited you?
- 17) How do you think this relationship has benefited your mentor?
- 18) How has this relationship benefited your company?
- 19) Has your mentor ever given you a special assignment that has exposed you to various levels of management.
- 20) Has anything or anyone in your company ever hindered your relationship in any way?
- 21) Have you ever had any negative experiences associated with your relationship?

- 22) Do you ever feel any degree of role ambiguity or role conflict? From what sources?
- 23) Tell me about something work or non-work related that you were responsible for but fell short on. Why did this happen, and how did you handle it?

Exhibit 3

Company Name	Mentor/Protégé	Gender	Age
Crane Plastics	Mentor	Male	47
	Protégé	Male	38
Farmers' Insurance	Mentor	Male	35
	Protégé	Male	38
Coldwell Banker	Mentor	Female	49
	Protégé	Male	47
John Deere	Mentor	Male	43
	Protégé	Male	39
Compuserve	Mentor	Male	31
	Protégé	Male	23
Fifth/Third	Mentor	Male	40
	Protégé	Male	34
Pharmacia	Mentor	Male	40
	Protégé	Male	?
Continental Office Furniture	Mentor	Male	46
	Protégé	Male	27
Saturn North	Mentor	Male	30
	Protégé	Male	27

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